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Graphic Design, Typesetting, Picture Research, Pre-Press & Print

Preparing material for print layout Common problems and practical solutions

Preparing the copy for layout

Copy length

The difficulties an editor faces when preparing the copy for layout depend greatly on the format of the page. For pages which contain longer articles the chief concern is the text length available for each page (taking into account planned image use). This is simple enough in that, if the designer/layout person already has a clear and regular page design format they can supply the editor with a good ballpark figure of the number of words to use.

From long experience, folk always tend to push the number of words for an article to, or over, the maximum word length given. it is strongly suggested though that one uses less rather than more. Having to cut back text after layout will lead to additional work and therefore possible additional cost. It is always easier, in terms of page layout, to 'spread an article out' rather than 'squeeze an article in'.

The art of successful page layout is to present the text being laid out as looking natural, approachable and easy to read – balancing both content and form. Ultimately though this does depend on the amount of copy that the person carrying out this task has to lay out to an individual page (or pages). It is always a shame to see great content lost by being made visually hard to follow because one is attempting to fit too much text content to the page.

For pages containing a series of shorter articles thier concern is not only the text length – but also making clear to the designer/layout person the *order* of these articles. Each editor has their own method but we tend to suggest that a series of articles for, as an example, a news page are send as one word file with the main article at the top and following articles, under their own planned headings, in order of importance. For smaller length publications, a single word-processing file may well be suitable for the *entire* publication – as long as page breaks are clearly marked.

Editing of copy before & after layout

Where multiple editors and commentators are involved in the process of compiling and editing a publication, it is strongly suggested that the process of reaching mutual agreement on content is reached before sending articles out for layout.

We would also suggest strongly that a single designated editor compiles amendments and corrections from multiple authors so that the designer/layout person can then work from a single list of all of the mutual-editor agreed changes.

A designer/layout person should always make some allowance within the costing for small amendments to a page layout – but a series of re-written article elements will be, understandably, charged for *in addition* to the agreed cost of the layout. It is work in addition to that originally agreed.

Where a process of re-writing after an initial layout is part of the process of laying out a publication – such as an academic journal requiring feedback from individual authors after initial layout – this should be raised, discussed and then built into the costing for layout of that particular publication.

Further information on approaches to proofing of laid out pages can be found in the following section of this guide.

Page planning

For the designer/layout person though the key consideration is the page order and feature association of the articles once gathered together for layout.

This *page plan* can simply be 'intended' – giving a rough plan that can be flexibly applied to suit actual text and image contents or very specific – depending on the type of publication. A skilled designer/layout person will be able to visually prioritise the article layout on a page based on the editors pointers – so an exact *page plan* is not always necessary.

A regular publication with regular page features and format, for example, is likely to be much more specific in the *page plan* that one is supplying.

Individual articles – such as word processing documents – should also be marked up for image use and specific feature use, along with additional notes on features such as sub headings and pull out qoutations where these are a feature of the publication, and article styles where these are to be specified.

Preparing a *page plan* will assist the designer greatly – it will show the intended order of the publications contents. it will also provide a list so that the designer will know that all of the material intended for inclusion has actually been sent.

It can prove very helpful for the editor. The page plan provides a double-check of the contents you wish to send over, ensuring that all of the material you wish to include in the final printed document have been included in the files sent.

A designer should be able to supply their clients with generic *page planning sheets* which can prove very helpful. Please do not hesitate to ask.